

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR 2017 CANDIDATES FOR THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Candidate: Robert Speth

Position: DPS District 1 At Large

Please answer in the space provided, explaining your answer as required. If you feel you need more space, you may attach a supplementary sheet.

QUESTION	CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE
Do you support the right of every child to attend the school nearest their home (or most accessible by available transportation)? If not, under what circumstances do you not?	Yes. When I meet people across the city, one theme is very consistent - families want to send their kids to their neighborhood school. Families don't have the resources to drive across town to a different school.
Under what circumstances, if any, would you support the use of public funds (vouchers) for private schools?	None.
Do you believe that financial decisions by DPS are sufficiently transparent? If not, how could/should they be made more transparent?	No - there is very little transparency. DPS could start by putting contracts with all third parties online. Currently much of that information is only available by a Colorado Open Records Act request, and often times the district charges fees for information that should be publicly available.
What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of public charter schools; and do you think the proportion of charter schools within the DPS is too high, too low, or about right?	One advantage of charter schools is their ability to implement specialized programs. For example, Florence Crittenton or the Denver Language School. Disadvantages of charter schools include limited transparency, lack of public control (they have privately appointed boards), and they don't serve ALL students equally. The proportion of charter schools in DPS is too high.
How would you rank order (1 = highest) the importance of the following factors in student success: (a) teacher quality, (b) quality of principal, (c) class size, (d) racial/ethnic integration, (e) economic means of family, (f) parental involvement? (Add any other factors that you consider important.)	This is a complicated question. I think in certain situations some could be argued as more important than others. The correlation between socio-economic status and student achievement is well documented - but as the saying goes "Correlation is not causation". i.e. Just because a student comes from a family that has little economically, doesn't mean they are destined to fail. But I am very supportive of services such as funding school nurses, psychologists, and family liaisons that can help make up for some of the deficiencies that students have at home. I think this is a better place to spend tax dollars than hiring more administrators, as DPS has done (their admin costs are 2-3x as other similar sized districts). I also think the research is clear that teacher quality and appropriate class size (this would generally be smaller than what DPS has now) are two of the only factors that can improve student outcomes. This is why I support only hiring certified teachers, which currently not all schools are required to do. I also support putting more financial resources directly into the

	<p>classroom, so that teachers have the resources they need, and classes are appropriately sized. Instead DPS has given millions of dollars to private corporations.</p>
<p>Recognizing that some schools may offer a specialized curriculum, in general do you favor broad-based curricula with extracurricular options, or curricula focused on basic English and STEM subjects?</p>	<p>In general I favor a well rounded, broad based curricula. Every student should have access to Music, Art, and Physical Education. We need to instill a love of school and a love of learning in our students from a very young age. Unfortunately what we've seen in the past 12 years with the expansion of high stakes testing is a narrowing of the curricula that is ultimately detrimental to students.</p>
<p>Do you favor foreign language courses for all students; and if so, at what grades should they begin?</p>	<p>Yes - I think students should be exposed to a foreign language. I would defer to teachers and education professionals as to what the "right" age to begin is.</p>
<p>Do you support the funding of nutritious school meal programs for children in need of them, or do you not see this as a responsibility of the public school system?</p>	<p>Yes, I absolutely support this. Right now, about 70% of DPS students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. For many students, this is the only nutritious meal(s) they eat in a day. Proper nutrition is critical for students to learn.</p>
<p>Under what circumstances, if any, would you make exception to the mandate for equal access to appropriate quality education for all challenged and special needs students?</p>	<p>None that I can think of.</p>

Most politicians (and parents) say they are opposed to excessive testing; but what is excessive, and can standards be raised to make our students nationally competitive without the use of standardized national tests?	My fourth grade son spent twelve days testing this year. That's definitely excessive. Not only that, but with test prep, lack of homework during testing season, and the desire for students to be "rested" so that they can perform their best on the test, there was basically no learning taking place for two months. Not only do we need to lessen the amount of standardized testing (I think a couple of days would be appropriate) we need to lessen the high-stakes nature of testing. Currently test results are used to fire teachers and close schools. We need to be helping teachers and supporting schools - not closing them.
Do you agree with zero-tolerance disciplinary policies in public schools?	In general, no.
Do you support "military style" management of student behavior?	No.
Under what circumstances, if any, do you support waiver of Colorado's licensure requirements for teachers?	None that I can think of.
Do you support initiatives to increase the proportion of people of color as administrators, teachers, and staff? If so, give examples of such initiatives.	Yes. Students need to be able to identify with their teachers, and see that anyone can be a teacher, principal, or school leader. I'm not aware of any initiatives that DPS has that have been successful at improving the proportion of teachers of color. For example, I believe only 4% of Denver's teachers are black, whereas 14% of Denver's students are black. For anyone who hasn't read the report by Dr. Sharon Bailey, please do so.
What would be your approach for dealing with schools deemed to be failing, starting with a statement of what your criteria for failure would be?	The notion that we need a criteria for failure only exists because an excuse is needed to close schools. We need to be helping schools - not closing them. We need to be working with school leaders, teachers, families, and communities to ensure that our schools have everything they need in order for kids to succeed.
Do you believe that all educational professionals have a right to organize?	Yes - absolutely. A strong teacher's union is critical for the balance of power to remain intact in our educational system.
Given limited resources, would you choose lower class sizes or higher teacher salaries?	We can and should do both. Cut admin costs, stop giving our public tax dollars to private corporations and consultants, and start investing more money in our classrooms, and with our teachers.
The ratio of administrators to teachers is much higher in the DPS than in all its surrounding school districts. Are you satisfied with the Administration's justification for more administrators because DPS receives and administers many more grants?	No. Just look at the size of the communications department, or the Department of Accountability, Research, and Evaluation (i.e. standardized testing). How many administrators work on closing schools? The high admin costs for DPS have little or nothing to do with the number of grants they administer, and everything to do with

	their adoption of their “Portfolio Management” approach to education.
Do you support limits on campaign contributions and full disclosure of donors for school board candidates?	Yes. School Board contributions should be limited in the same way they are for other city and state offices.
Do you favor allowing school staff members including teachers to be designated as security officers and to carry concealed firearms?	No.
How do you think mandatory attendance should be enforced?	I would have to understand more about the scope of the problem, and hear from school leaders about what has / has not worked in the past.
Though Denver voters approved a mill levy increase to broaden offerings in fine arts and physical education, some schools do not yet offer this broader curriculum. What should be done to implement the will of the voters?	We should have never approved schools that don’t have these offerings. I think the district needs to work with individual schools to hold schools accountable. If they aren’t going to do that, then the School Board will need to take action, such as not renewing any school that doesn’t offer this.